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Supporting and Protecting Victims



Photo: USAID/Suzanne Ross

The New Life Center has helped more than 1,000 women and children avoid exploitation and make positive change in their lives.

About a million tribal people live in more than 3,500 villages throughout Thailand. Many speak only tribal languages and cannot understand public education messages delivered in Thai. As sustaining their traditionally nomadic lifestyle becomes more difficult, tribal people become vulnerable to poverty and social and economic exploitation, especially human trafficking. Profits from trafficking are estimated to reach over a billion dollars a year in Thailand alone. And when tribal girls are rescued from traffickers, there is little support and protection available to them while waiting to serve as witnesses in court — a wait that can last up to five years.

USAID supports the New Life Center Foundation, a faith-based organization that protects rescued victims and works with tribal girls who are at risk for labor exploitation. The Center provides 120 girls with an education, a safe living environment and training in vocational and life skills. The residents contribute to the community's awareness of exploitation by writing and presenting soap operas in several local dialects for a radio campaign that spans the greater Mekong region. The shows reach more than 60,000 people in remote areas of Thailand, giving them a portrayal of trafficking, violence and HIV/AIDS that aims to change risky behavior.

Activities at the New Life Center Foundation help victims begin to heal and start a new life. "While we wait to serve as witnesses, we are going to school and learning skills to support ourselves," said one resident. "This helps me feel more confident about my future."